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Burnout and Stress in Disaster Relief Volunteers: Recommendations to Improve Volunteer Retention and Engagement

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Burnout and Stress in Disaster Relief Volunteers: Recommendations to Improve Volunteer Retention and Engagement

by

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Report

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Abstract

Burnout and Stress in Disaster Relief Volunteers: Recommendations to Improve Volunteer Retention and Engagement

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There is an ever-increasing reliance on volunteers to provide frontline services during disaster relief operations. Without volunteers, organizations such as the American Red Cross could not function. Burnout and secondary traumatic stress are issues of concern as disaster relief volunteers work long hours in intense and unpredictable environments. Given their pivotal role, the ability to maintain, manage and support trained and prepared volunteers is essential.

This report explores the lived experiences of disaster relief volunteers through semi-structured interviews and a focus group with 17 volunteers of the American Red Cross Central Texas Chapter and the Austin Disaster Relief Network. Secondly, this study determines organizational and individual factors that contribute to volunteers' experience of burnout and secondary traumatic stress. This paper concludes by recommending volunteer support mechanisms to reduce burnout and stress and improve retention.

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Executive Summary

Every year millions of Americans donate their time, talent and energy for the social good without monetary compensation for a phenomenon known as volunteerism. In 2012, approximately 62.5 million adults, or 25.4% of the adult population in the United States, gave 7.7 billion hours of volunteer service, a value worth $173 billion (CNCS, 2013). This illustrates the considerable importance volunteers have in fulfilling the mission and work of nonprofit organizations. As the backbone of the nonprofit industry, many organizations would be unable to continue or would have to restrict services severely without the engagement of volunteers.

Though the rate of volunteerism is relatively strong, the 2013 Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) research brief found that more than two-thirds of individuals who volunteer one year will not return to donate their time again the following year. This is an estimated $38 billion in lost labor (CNCS, 2013). This is of particular concern given that high volunteer turnover can have broader implications for organizations to recruit and retain a strong volunteer base (Grossman & Furano, 1999).

One area of concern is disaster relief, given an ever-increasing reliance on volunteers to provide frontline services during disaster-relief operations. Between 2000 and 2014, there were 849 major disaster declarations in the United States (FEMA, 2015). More than 18,000 nonprofit organizations are registered as having a disaster preparedness and relief function (Guidestar, 2015). Just one nonprofit organization, the American Red Cross (ARC), reported in 2011 having spent $283 million on domestic disaster services and responded to 60,000 disasters across the country (ARC, 2012). With the help of 500,000 volunteers the ARC averaged spending only $4,716 per disaster in 2011 (ARC,

2012). The work and readiness of the Red Cross volunteer corps allows the organization to maximize their monetary resources.

The extensive usage of volunteers in a disaster event calls for more careful examination of the volunteers' experience in the field, including volunteer training programs, supervision, and secondary traumatic stress and burnout prevention. This research study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What themes emerge from participants' accounts of their experience?
2. How do volunteers experience burnout, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction? What factors contribute to their experience of burnout and/or compassion fatigue and/or compassion satisfaction?
3. To what extent are factors agency-solvable? To what extent do they reflect external factors or other factors not controllable by the agency?

For this exploratory qualitative study, 10 disaster relief volunteers from the American Red Cross Central Texas Chapter and the Austin Disaster Relief Network Disaster were interviewed and 7 participated in a focus group in June 2015 and July 2015. Findings from this study are in-line with previous research.

Volunteers characterized a disaster relief operation as emotionally and physically intense and unpredictable. Previous research has shown that disaster relief workers often experience high levels of work stress, such as heavy work load and long working hours (Thormar et al., 2010). Volunteers from this study expressed exhaustion, loss of energy, stress, feeling sick, and feeling hopeless during and after their service. Research studies have indicated that volunteer intent to quit is due to feelings of burnout and stress (Allen & Mueller, 2013; Cyr & Dorwick, 1991; Jansen, 2010; Rozwadwska et al., 2011).

Many factors have been shown to be influential in preventing burnout in trauma workers such as level of preparation, length of exposure to trauma event, job experience,

and supervision (Chang et al., 2003; Perrin et al., 2007; Tak et al., 2007). Although volunteer training programs are a standard requirement for most organizations, they are usually time-bound and attempt to cover a lot of information. Volunteers in this study reported the majority of their training time being spent on concrete knowledge and skills required to perform their tasks. The limited focus and training time does not leave room for integrating and conceptualizing a coherent role perception (Warner, 2011). Moreover, volunteer motivation and the demand for services resulted in 12 hour work days. Previous research determined that volunteers are unable to develop boundary maintenance, especially in the beginning of their service (Warner, 2011).

The study focuses on volunteer management strategies, providing disaster relief organizations a better understanding of the policies and practices required to retain volunteers and prevent volunteer burnout. Figure 1 illustrates the aim of this research.

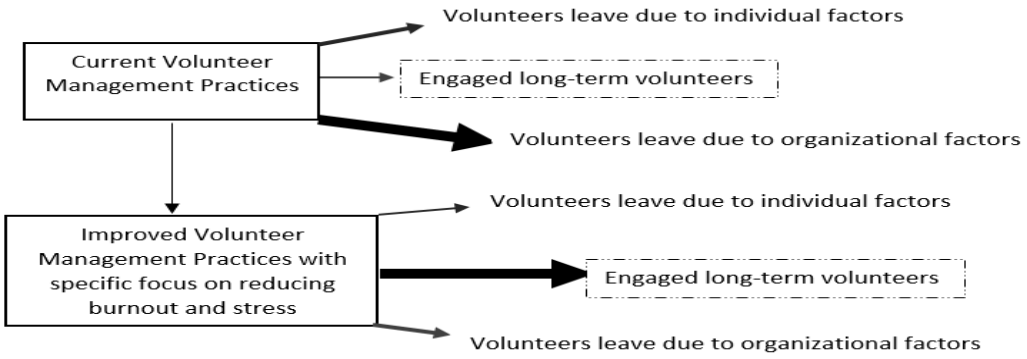

Figure 1: Theory of Current Research

From the organizational perspective, the reasons for the level of stress are inadequate training and role perception, long work hours due to the unpredictable nature of working on a disaster relief operation, lack of resources, deficient supervision and debriefing process and inefficient feedback loops. Individual factors are volunteers'

inability to set boundaries, personality, and coping skills. Recommendations to improve volunteer retention and the prevention of volunteer burnout include:

1. **Reduce exposure by setting work limits for volunteers.** Volunteers are unable to set limitations due to an inadequate role perception and pressure felt from to the sense of urgency that characterizes a disaster. The agency has the authority to control volunteer exposure. Time-limited shifts may reduce burnout and mediate traumatic stress.
2. **Provide a realistic preview of disaster relief work.** The findings suggest that not all volunteers due to their personality and coping skills are suited to fieldwork. By providing an extensive job description volunteers have a concrete concept of the possible hardships of disaster relief work and can determine if the job is congruent with their personality.
3. **Prepare volunteers for the physical and emotional demands that are required as well as the technical skills need to effectively perform their jobs.** Awareness of the pitfalls that volunteers may encounter reduces the impact of burnout and traumatic stress in the long-term (Jankoski, 2010). Volunteers in this study trained in burnout awareness reported being better prepared.

Given the pivotal role nonprofits play in providing emergency assistance in the wake of disasters, it is important for organizations to safeguard their trained and prepared volunteers. As the findings from this study indicate, the stressful nature of a disaster relief operation can potentially cause volunteer burnout and stress. Organizations that strengthen their resources, namely their volunteers, by looking after their health and well-being maximize their positive impact on communities and enhance capacity for volunteer retention.

Chapter 1: Background

A good understanding of burnout, its dynamics, and what to do to overcome it is therefore an essential part of staying true to the pursuit of a noble cause, and keeping the flame of compassion and dedication burning brightly. – Maslach & Leiter, 2005

Previous research provides valuable insight into some of the key themes concerning disaster relief work and volunteering. The first section focuses on nonprofits' responsibility and response when a disaster strikes. Specifically, it examines the American Red Cross and the Austin Disaster Relief Network. The second section focuses on volunteerism, highlighting rates and socio-economic benefit of volunteering, characteristics and motivations of volunteers, volunteerism in emergencies and the consequences of volunteering. Burnout and secondary traumatic stress are specifically covered as consequences of volunteering in a disaster. Lastly, volunteer management and the implication of burnout on nonprofits' ability to retain volunteers is examined.

THE ROLE OF NONPROFITS IN A DISASTER

Natural disasters are uncontrollable events that have the potential to disrupt individual lives as well as family and community structures. Between 2000 and 2014, there were 849 major disaster declarations in the United States (FEMA, 2015). The increasing frequency and magnitude of disasters in the United States requires the cooperation and contribution of many nonprofit groups to support victims through the recovery process. In fact, more than 18,600 nonprofit organizations are registered as

having a disaster preparedness and relief function in the United States (Guidestar, 2015). Nonprofits tend to have a “latent emergency function” meaning that while they have no disaster related day-to-day mission these types of groups are expected to be active during disasters and provide critical services to survivors (Dynes, 1970).

For example, on a daily basis the Red Cross provides CPR and safety training, blood collection, and veteran support. Though volunteers are integrated within the daily operations of the Red Cross, during a time of a disaster the internal and external structure shifts to fulfill disaster functions. Nonprofits have the ability to call on pre-established relationships with other groups. Most organizations with a disaster relief focus have limited physical and human resources as they largely rely on donations, grants and volunteers (Boris & Steurele, 2006; Smith, 2005). The physical and human capacities may have a significant influence on the volunteers' disaster involvement and how they perceive the events and their assigned tasks (Moran, Britton, & Corey, 1992).

The mission and goals of the nonprofits determine their overall role and involvement in disasters. To the extent of their capacity, nonprofits run shelters, provide safe harbor, assist in the provision of food and basic supplies, repair and rebuild homes, coordinate volunteers and donations, offer legal assistance, and provde mental and spiritual counseling (Egan & Tischler, 2010; Fagoni, 2006; Pipa, 2006). Frequently, more disaster relief efforts require volunteers from two or more organizations to cooperate on a particular task. This professional report focuses on the experiences of the volunteers associated with the American Red Cross and the Austin Disaster Relief Network. As part of the literature review, a broad overview of each organization is provided.

American Red Cross (ARC)

The American Red Cross (ARC) depends on volunteers to serve in leadership roles but also to bear the responsibility for much of its front line service delivery: training and coordinating volunteers and providing direct assistance to victims of disaster. The ARC bears a unique responsibility in times of disaster given that it is the sole organization congressionally mandated to provide disaster relief, both domestically and internationally (ARC Governance for the 21st century, 2006). Because of its unique role, the ARC is frequently the primary responder and coordinator of other relief agencies in times of a major disaster and thus, the organization most visible in the relief operation.

The ARC's organizational structure is typically new in each disaster given that employees and volunteers arrive at the scene from different parts of the country or surrounding area, consequently creating new relations each time. In addition to high profile disasters, the ARC also responds to smaller disasters that only affect individuals or a handful of families, such as residential and apartment fires. On average, the ARC responds to more than 60,000 natural and manmade disasters every year (ARC, 2011). In order to maintain this level of response, the organization depends on its corps of nearly 500,000 trained volunteers (ARC, 2011).

The policies and procedures that dictate how disaster services are to be delivered are grounded in seven principles of the worldwide Red Cross Movement: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality (ARC, 2011a). The national office of the ARC is located in Washington D.C. with their mission being to provide leadership and support to local chapters. Local chapters are responsible for the response and recovery efforts in their designated area, including the management of volunteers. Due to regional differences, each local chapter has a distinct organizational culture.

All volunteers undergo a background check and orientation training. The orientation training is meant to provide the volunteer with an overview of the service areas in which the volunteer can get trained and provide help. Volunteer opportunities are in disaster services, administrative support staff, public affairs, and veteran support, among others. All training offered through the ARC for disaster services is free of charge. For this study, volunteers were recruited from disaster service functions with direct contact with victims such as sheltering and casework from the ARC Central Texas Chapter.

Austin Disaster Relief Network (ADRN)

The Austin Disaster Relief Network is a Christian-based organization that works with 180 local churches in the Austin metropolitan service area to provide emotional, physical and spiritual needs of those affected by disaster. Whereas the Red Cross' mission is to provide humanitarian aid primarily in the form of basic physical needs, the ARDN as a religious organization has a primary mission to "minister to the overwhelming emotional and spiritual needs of individuals affected by a disaster" (ADRN, 2014).

ADRN manages a network of volunteers through their Christian member churches. According to the ADRN website, their ultimate goal is to make sure every family affected by a disaster is sponsored by a church within their network to provide for their emotional, physical and spiritual short and long-term needs in an effective, efficient and organized manner.

ADRN requires all volunteers to attend an orientation training and go through a background check before going into the field. ADRN offers two main types of general training for volunteers who go into the field:

- Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) is a federally approved certification course. It is a physical support basic training aimed at teaching the essentials of disaster preparedness in the event that professional responders are not immediately available to help. Topics include fire safety, search and rescue, disaster medical operations and psychology, and terrorism. CERT training through the ADRN costs $105.
- Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is an internationally recognized certification course focused on emotional support basic training provided to volunteers to so that they are prepared to deal with the mental, emotional and spiritual issues most encountered by victims of a disaster event. Topics include trauma and intervention techniques. CISM training through the ADRN costs $105.

Volunteers who provide support service at the ADRN headquarters, such as in the call center, are not required to have CERT or CISM. Trainings for headquarter positions are available and are free of charge. For this study, volunteers who respond both in the field and at the ADRN headquarters' call center were recruited.

VOLUNTEERISM

Every year millions of Americans donate their time, talent and energy without compensation for a phenomenon known as volunteerism. In 2012, approximately 62.5 million adults, or 25.4% of the adult population in the United States, gave 7.7 billion hours of volunteer service worth $173 billion (CNCS, 2013). Wilson (2000) defines volunteering as “an activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or cause” (p.215). Though there is disagreement among scholars on the whether the definition should include benefits received from this work or whether volunteering

should be concerned with intentions or motives, volunteering is considered a helping behavior linked to altruism (Wilson, 2000).

Scholars attribute an individual's identification, connection, and satisfaction with the organization as the number one predictor of motivation to join and stay as a volunteer (Cheney, et al., 2004; Dorsch et al., 2002). More measurable than values, behaviors that demonstrate loyalty to the organization and its policies can be valid indicators of organizational identification (Cheney et al., 2004). Perhaps, more than most organizations, disaster relief organizations, such as the ARC and ADRN, place greater value on collective identity.

These organizations act to facilitate the identification process by recognizing volunteer service with pins and certificates that bear their organizational emblems. Furthermore, volunteers in both agencies are required to wear matching vests or shirts emblazoned with their organization's logo. At an even deeper level, volunteer orientation and training provides a vehicle for transmission of the organization's core values. In performing their duties and through sharing stories of their experiences, volunteers reinforce organizational values.

Volunteers' commitment to an organization is related to the degree of satisfaction they feel with their work experience (Dorsch et al., 2002). An important factor in the volunteer's level of satisfaction relates to working conditions, including equipment, technology, space, and the communication of policies and procedures (Dorsch et al., 2002). Moreover, the organization must not disappoint the volunteer. Volunteers who find their actual experience to fall short of satisfying their original motivations to volunteer are more likely to leave the organization (Cheney et al., 2004).

Volunteerism in Emergencies

Researchers have found that disasters have the ability to enhance solidarity and morale within a community, and there is greater public involvement and participation with priorities shifting to protect human life in response to disasters (Batniji et al., 2006; Dynes, 1970; Tierney et al., 2001; Ursano et al., 2007; Weil, 2010). In 2005, over 500 thousand volunteers responded to Hurricane Katrina (National Service, 2006) and most recently, two thousand volunteers responded to the Central Texas Memorial Day Floods that occurred May 2015 (Graczyk, 2015).

Baxter-Tomkins and Wallace (2006) estimate that permanent disaster volunteers save governments and society millions of dollars each year. The ARC reported in 2011 having spent $283 million on domestic disaster services and responded to 60,000 disasters across the country including Joplin Tornadoes, Hurricane Irene, and Bastrop County Complex Fire (ARC, 2012). With the help of 500 thousand volunteers the ARC averaged spending only $4,716 per disaster in 2011 (ARC, 2012). The work and readiness of the Red Cross volunteer corps allows the organization to maximize their monetary resources.

Given the important role of volunteers, the dearth of studies that have focused specifically on the experience and mental health impact of volunteering in a disaster setting is surprising (Adams, 2007; Thormar et al., 2010). Researchers agree that direct service providers are often the neglected survivors of disaster and speculate that volunteers are ignored by researchers and their organizations alike because of the stereotype that helpers are strong and resourceful (Adams, 2007; Thormar et al., 2010).

Disaster relief volunteers are expected to adapt to the demands that may arise in the field and to be ready to take on the tasks that need to be done (Perrin et al., 2007; Thormar et al., 2010). Furthermore, once in the field they are often on their own and must

rely on their personal judgment (Perrin et al., 2007). Researchers in post-disaster interventions have agreed that the promotion of a sense of safety and calm, self- and community-efficacy, connectedness, and hope are essential in post-disaster interventions and prevention efforts (Hobfoll et al., 2007).

Proper planning and preparation for emotional and psychological post-disaster effects should be given high priority and could be a determining factor in a community's ability to be resilient. In order for organizations such as the American Red Cross to be adequately prepared for the outcomes that disasters may bring, the organization must consider how disasters affect volunteers and the organizational factors that influence the mental health of volunteers.

Benefits and Consequences of Volunteering in Emergencies

There has been extensive research on the benefit analysis of volunteering (Wilson, 2000). Cited personal benefits include new or improved skills, social networks, self-esteem, increase life satisfaction and connection to community (Wilson, 2000). Specifically, disaster relief volunteers report positive experiences that renewed personal convictions or re-evaluation of life priorities and a sense of belonging or camaraderie (Young et al., 1998).

Though a volunteer contributes time and skills to helping others with no expectation of pay or other material benefit to themselves, this does not mean that volunteer work is of no consequence for the volunteer. The negative stressors experienced by helpers can be of two kinds: occupational and personal (Young et al., 1998). Both types of stress contribute to the volunteers' potential emotional impact. Occupational stressors can include exposure to the suffering of others, rescuing and aiding survivors, long hours, extreme fatigue, space constraints and uncomfortable

temperatures (Jansen, 2010; Krajewska, 2011; Norris, 2005; Young et al., 1998). Personal or situational variables that can also affect the volunteers' reaction are low levels of personal and professional readiness, prior disaster experience, self-expectations, low levels of social support, and previous traumatization (Jankoski, 2010; Ozer et al., 2008; Young et al, 1998).

The research on burnout and secondary traumatic stress has primarily focused on professional emergency responders, social service and health workers including police officers, counselors and social workers (Graff, 2005; Jankoski, 2010; Ozer et al., 2008; Spring et al., 2011; Yamatani et al., 2009). One study on Red Cross volunteers found high levels of traumatic stress up to 18 months post-disaster (Thormar et al., 2013). Unlike social service professionals equipped with extensive training, knowledge, and resources to treat secondary trauma, volunteers may not have the tools to identify signs of burnout and secondary traumatic stress (Rozwadwska et al., 2011). However, because of the similarities of some experiences, such as long working works and the exposure to the suffering of others, the literature on professional emergency responders' experience with burnout and traumatic stress is relevant to this study.

Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

Organizational research shows that there is a strong correlation between environmental and organizational stressors and turnover rates (Ching-Fu & Yu, 2014). Research studies have indicated that volunteer's intent to quit is due to feelings of burnout and stress (Allen & Mueller, 2013; Cyr & Dorwick, 1991; Jansen, 2010; Rozwadwska et al., 2011).

According to Maslach and Jackson (1986) burnout is typically characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal achievement.

Individuals who experience burnout have symptoms of fatigue, feelings of helplessness, low self-esteem and cynicism (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Burnout is related to environmental and organizational workplace stressors (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Jenkins & Baird, 2002). Heavy workload, emotionally demanding roles, limited support, role conflict and role ambiguity have been consistently associated with burnout (Allen & Mueller, 2013; Cyr & Dorwick, 1991; Jansen, 2010; Jenkins & Baird, 2002; Rozwadwska et al., 2011). Young et al. (1998) also identified that coordination of multiple-agency response can increase confusion and lead to stress for workers. Table 1 summarizes the organizational factors that lead to burnout.

Table 1: Six Predictors of Burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Work life Category	**Characteristic**
Workload	exposure to the disaster event in length of working hours, task assigned, and loss of resources
Control	preparation, training, role ambiguity and access to resources
Rewards	the recognition or appreciation for work contributions
Community	relationships with peers, supervision, and feedback
Fairness	openness and respect are present in the organization and the decision-making process
Values	represents the congruence between the organization's priorities and values and those of the volunteer.

Secondary traumatic stress (STS) was first introduced by Figley in 1991 and later re-coined as compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995) as a normative occupational hazard of working with victims of traumatic events and trauma-linked material and can be experienced by any individual exposed to this setting. STS may be considered a form of burnout, but there are some differences between the two concepts (Figley, 2002).

Burnout is largely characterized by exhaustion from involvement with stressors while STS arises from the vivid re-counting of the trauma experienced by the victim and the trauma workers' subsequent cognitive or emotional interpretation (Figley, 2002). Individuals who experience STS have psychological distress, cognitive shifts, relational disturbances and experience a diminished capacity or interest in bearing the suffering of others (Figley, 1995).

Figley (2002) proposed that 10 variables – empathetic ability, empathetic concern, exposure to the client, empathic response, stress, sense of achievement, disengagement, prolonged exposure, traumatic recollections, and life disruption – interact to contribute to the development of STS. To protect against intrusive thoughts and generalized anxiety, trauma workers may dissociate to some degree, distance themselves from others, become overwhelmed with helplessness or become emotionally numb (Salston & Figely, 2003).

Trauma research shows that both the environmental characteristics of the disaster event (i.e. magnitude, preparedness, chronicity) and the individual's characteristics (i.e. perception of the event, coping skills, social support resources) reduce an exposed individual's risk for developing traumatic stress symptomatology (Adams, 2007; Aydin , 2010; Ozer et al., 2008). Moreover, research has shown that the level of experience is an important factor and those with the least experience may be at greater risk for traumatic stress symptoms (Moran et al., 1992; Ozer et al., 2008).

Moran and colleagues (1992) explored coping strategies of volunteers, finding that participants' reactions were positively associated with the amount of training they received and a focus on the task at hand. They also found that participants often used talking and humor as a way of coping in the face of disaster (Moran et al.,, 1992). Adequate individual preparation for a stressful event can minimize the impact of the event and may even protect affected individuals from the development of burnout and

traumatic stress symptoms (Jankoski, 2010). By reducing uncertainty, preparation for an event will increase one's feelings of control and will cause existing coping skills to be more resilient under stress (Jankoski, 2010).

Recognition and treatment of burnout and STS are pivotal in addressing the needs of the volunteer. Palm et al. (2004) assert that STS could be minimized by creating conditions that are conducive to healthy personal and occupational functioning. Although the primary focus of STS and burnout interventions has traditionally been on the individual, organizational level interventions can complement and enhance individual strategies (Bercier, 2013; Palm et al., 2004).

IMPLICATION TO NONPROFITS

There are three times as many nonprofit organizations in the United States than there were 20 years ago (Guidestar, 2007). This makes committed volunteers high in demand. Though the rate of volunteerism is relatively strong at 25% of the population, the 2013 Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) research brief found that volunteerism dropped almost five percentage points and is at an all-time low from 2002 when the organization and the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics explicitly began tracking volunteerism. Researchers speculate that decline is due to competing options for leisure time activities, changing demographics and motivations of volunteers, and overstretched responsibilities in the home and workplace (Graff, 2002).

According to the CNCS (2013), more than two-third of individuals who volunteer one year will not return to donate their time again the following year. This is an estimated $38 billion in lost labor (CNCS, 2013). The actual lost value might even be greater than the reported $38 billion considering a paid employee may earn more than the estimated value of a volunteer's time at $20/hour (Independent Sector, 2014). The primary

implication for organizations if volunteers experience burnout and secondary traumatic stress is volunteer attrition. The high turnover rate of 66% among volunteers is detrimental to volunteer-based nonprofit organizations because it negatively impacts the agency's capacity to deliver its mission services (CNCS, 2013; Grossman & Furano, 1999).

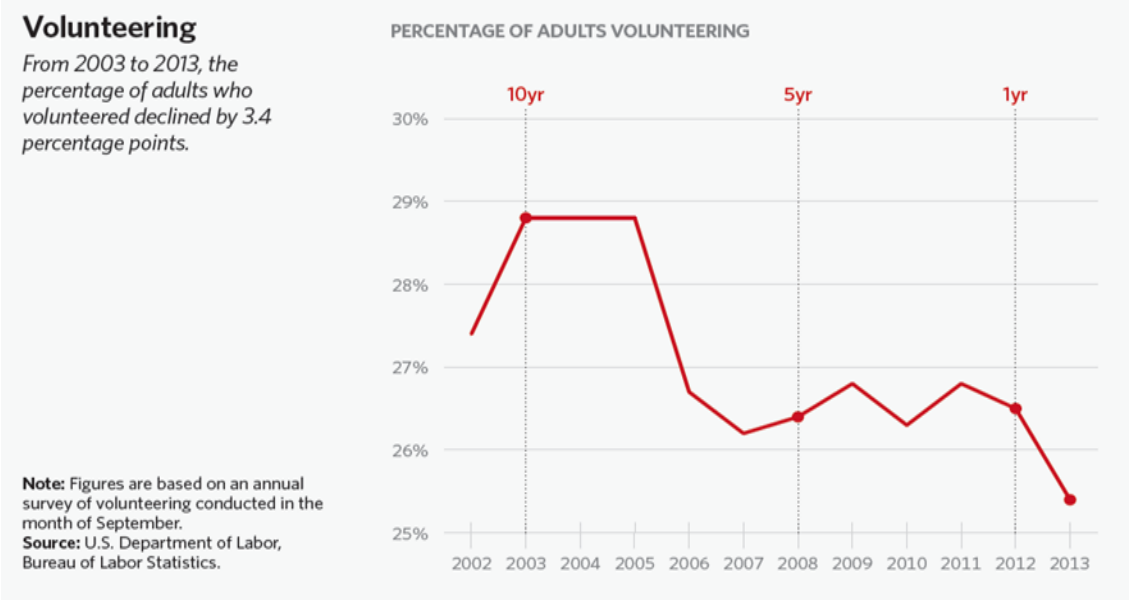

Figure 2. Percentage of Adult Volunteers
U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013.

Although turnover is expected in volunteer organizations and can create opportunities for change, high rates of attrition can hinder the capacity of the organization to provide quality services to clients. In addition, to the potential diminished quality of services, agencies incur substantial costs to recruit, screen, and on-board new volunteers (Jamison, 2003). The impact of a volunteer's withdrawal can also have severe non-monetary costs, especially if the volunteer developed personal relationships with clients and volunteer peers, leading to a departure domino effect (Grossman & Furano, 1999).

Research has shown that volunteers who feel supported by the organization and believe that their work is valued are more likely to feel committed to the organization (Grossman & Furano, 1999; Hager & Brudney, 2004; Jamison, 2003). Scholars identified three critical organizational factors that affect volunteer turnover and retention: 1) screening and placement in organization, 2) orientation and training, 3) management and ongoing support (Grossman & Furano, 1999; Jamison, 2003). These elements coincide with three of Hobfoll et al. (2007) suggested elements of a post-disaster intervention and prevention practice: 1) sense of safety - orientation and training; 2) sense of calm - screening and placement, tasks assigned, length of work hours; 3) connectedness - management and organizational support. Research supported by the Urban Institute concluded that, "no matter how well intentioned volunteers are, unless there is an infrastructure in place to support and direct their efforts, they will remain ineffective at best, or worse, become disenchanted and withdraw, potentially damaging recipients of services in the process" (Hager & Brudney, 2004).

SUMMARY

The research suggests that due to the nature of a disaster event being unpredictable. High levels of human suffering, a sense of urgency and a high workload places disaster relief volunteers at risk for burnout and secondary traumatic stress. Volunteer burnout and secondary traumatic stress can have major implications to nonprofit organizations in being able to provide mission-driven services and the financial cost to replace a trained volunteer. The literature review revealed several organizational factors that can mediate and prevent burnout and secondary stress: creating a sense of safety for volunteers through proper training, creating a sense of calm for volunteers through work structure and supervision, and creating connection via organizational support. Finally, the literature

review indicated that there is a paucity of understanding the experiences of disaster relief volunteers as it relates to burnout and secondary traumatic stress. This study used semi-structured interviews to elicit descriptions of the experiences of participants in order to fill this gap.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology and Data Analysis

The intent of the study is to understand how a disaster event may affect volunteers physically and emotionally, as well as how disaster relief agencies such as the American Red Cross (ARC) and the Austin Disaster Relief Network (ADRN) can better train and support volunteers to sustain their involvement. This study utilized a mixed-method approach to research, using semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a structured survey to explore the research questions. This method was chosen as it facilitates discovery of the varied experiences and perspectives of disaster responders with the ARC and the ADRN.

This research is specifically interested in volunteers' perceptions of training and preparedness for disaster relief work, what challenges they faced in their volunteer role and how they coped with challenges faced, their overall satisfaction as a volunteer, and their experience with training in burnout prevention. Conducting in-depth interviews and focus groups allowed for rich detail and direct feedback from participants.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Drawing from the literature, the following questions were posed for this study:

RQ1: What themes emerge from participants' accounts of their volunteer experience?

RQ2: How do volunteers experience burnout and/or compassion fatigue and/or compassion satisfaction? What factors contribute to their experience of burnout and/or compassion fatigue and/or compassion satisfaction?

RQ3: To what extent are factors agency soluble? To what extent do they reflect external factors or other factors not controllable by the agency?

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research primarily employs a qualitative approach with a complementary structured questionnaire to examine volunteers' experience in a disaster relief event or operation. Volunteers were asked to participate in a one-hour semi-structured interview or a one-hour focus group and complete a structured demographic questionnaire and survey measuring burnout, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction. The demographic questionnaire requested participants to provide information regarding their age, years of education, marital status, and ethnicity along with information about the length of their volunteer service and what they considered to be their primary job. The Compassion Fatigue Self-Test was used to assess burnout, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction (see Appendix D) (Figley, 1995).

Qualitative Approach

Interviews were the primary method of data collection for this research. The interviews were conducted with five ARC volunteer disaster responders and five ADRN volunteer disaster responders during the months of June 2015 and July 2015. The interviews lasted between one to two hours. In addition, seven volunteers participated in a focus group in July 2015 that lasted two hours. I employed a semi-structured interview and focus group guide to help ensure that pertinent questions were asked (see Appendix C), but also allowed for digressions by the respondent. By asking open-ended questions, participants were able to share relevant stories regarding their own disaster experiences. The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board approved this interview and focus group guide: Study No. 2015-04-0076. See appendix for informed consent form, full interview and focus guide.

Quantitative Approach

The study employed Figley's (1995) Compassion Fatigue Self-Test, a 66-item measure devised to measure burnout, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction. It was designed to be an educational tool and warning device. Participants rate each item on a 6-point Likert scale (0=never to 5=very often) indicating how frequently they have experiences characterized by statements such as, "I have flashbacks connected to those I help" and "I have experienced intrusive though of time with especially difficult people I helped." Each participant was asked to complete the questionnaire after their interview or focus group session. As a tested and validated measure of burnout, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction, the questionnaire complements the qualitative data by corroborating volunteers' experience.

Setting and Population

This study took place among the volunteers of the ARC Central Texas chapter and the ADRN located in Austin, Texas. The ARC and ADRN have similar missions in providing disaster response, relief, and recovery to victims of a disaster. One month prior to the beginning of data collection, the Central Texas Memorial Day floods occurred. All participants had actively responded to this disaster event.

Participants were located through purposive non-probability sampling. Babbie (2013) defines purposive sampling as selecting participants "on the basis of knowledge of a population, its elements, and the purpose of the study" (p.190). I was able to use personal contacts within the ARC and ADRN who passed along information regarding my research interests and contact information in order to recruit participants. I assured all participants that their participation was strictly voluntary, their names were kept confidential, and no compensation would be provided (see Appendix B).

Though participants in this study were not chosen by age, all volunteers were adults, age 18 or older. Gender was also not a qualifying factor in recruiting volunteers; my sample size was too small to come up with meaningful comparisons by gender. My only requirement for participants in the study was that they have responded to at least one disaster relief event or operation in Central Texas through their respective agencies. All participants received a letter of invitation to participate in an individual interview or focus group and in the structured measures (see Appendix A).

Ten volunteer disaster responders were interviewed. All participants met the requirement of having at least one disaster response experience. Participants had varied lengths of service from 8 months to 8 years. The breakdown of the demographic interviewee sample is depicted in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Demographics of Interview Participants.

Participant Number & Agency	Gender	Race	Age	No. of years volunteering	No. of Disaster Relief Ops	Employment Status
ADRN 1	F	White	65	5 years	3	Retired
ADRN 2	F	White	40	10 months	1	Part-time
ADRN 3	F	White	43	8 months	1	Unemployed
ADRN 4	F	White	46	5 years	4	Full-time
ADRN 5	M	White	47	6 years	5+	Full-time
ARC 1	M	White	58	1 year	1	Retired
ARC 2	M	White	66	10 years	5+	Retired
ARC 3	M	White	66	8 years	5+	Retired
ARC 4	F	White	53	10 years	5+	Full-time
ARC 5	F	White	64	4 years	5+	Retired

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND CODING

The interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure that the appropriate meaning was conveyed. Content analysis provided the basis for qualitative analysis and discussion of open-ended questions. By identifying basic themes, attitudinal or organizational patterns emerged to provide insight into volunteers' experience and opinion about the organization.

The process of organizing and analyzing the data was made more efficient with assistance of the software program NVivo10, an application designed to assist researchers with the organization and analysis of qualitative data. Seven main nodes that corresponded to the research questions and interview questions were set up in NVivo. Each interview was read and data was copied and pasted verbatim into nodes. After doing all ten interviews in this manner, I read through the interviews again and coded each line. At this stage, themes began to emerge within the original nodes. Finally, an analysis of all the nodes and the data contained in each was completed. Table 3 is an example of the thematic coding used.

Table 3. Example of Thematic Coding

Participant Narrative	Code	Theme
"there wasn't anybody that could cover despite putting effort toward that"	Challenge: workload; job pressure; org structure; Boundaries	The workload is intense. Volunteers lack the ability to set boundaries.
"the challenge is working 12 hour shifts and still appearing to be empathetic..."	Workload; Burnout symptom;	
"I saw the need and couldn't go home…"	Workload; Personal Boundaries; job pressure	
"when burning on adrenaline, you don't realize that you haven't peed all day, and that isn't good."	Personal boundaries; job pressure; workload	

QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Each volunteer interviewed completed Figley's (1995) Compassion Self-Test, resulting in ten complete questionnaires. Each questionnaire was scored according to Figley's (1995) compassion assessment profile to determine the level of burnout, compassion fatigue (or secondary traumatic stress) and compassion satisfaction each volunteer experiences. This information coupled with volunteers' personal narrative helped to triangulate the experiences of volunteers as related to burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

Chapter 3: Findings

The purpose of this study is to examine the overall experiences of disaster relief volunteers in the field including their feelings and reactions to their volunteer assignment and workload training, supervision, engagement and interaction with the organization. I addressed three main research questions:

- RQ1: What themes emerge from participants' accounts of their volunteer experience?
- RQ2: How do volunteers experience burnout and/or compassion fatigue and/or compassion satisfaction? What factors contribute to their experience of burnout and/or compassion fatigue and/or compassion satisfaction?
- RQ3: To what extent does this relationship reflect agency solvable factors? To what extent do they reflect external factors or other factors outside of the agency's control?

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The qualitative data presented in this chapter reflect the experiences of 17 disaster relief volunteers from the Austin Disaster Relief Network (ADRN) and the American Red Cross Central Texas Chapter (ARC). Ten interviews were conducted between June 2015 and July 2015 and one focus group with 7 participants in July 2015. The ADRN and the ARC granted permission to conduct the study and reach out to their respective volunteers for participation.

The research findings are organized into several categories and themes that emerge to answer the study's question. First, I explore the overall experience that volunteers have while on a disaster relief operation. These experiences are grouped into

three main themes: 1) the environmental aspect of a disaster relief operation can be unsettling, 2) the workload is intense and there is pressure to fill the need, and 3) every disaster is different and flexibility is required. Secondly, I explore how volunteers experience burnout and/or traumatic stress by examining explicit symptoms of burnout and traumatic stress such as feeling exhausted or having flashbacks that prompt sadness or fear. I also gauge compassion satisfaction through their feelings of connection with the agency, peers, and intent to continue volunteering. Table 4 shows categories and themes for compassion satisfaction.

Table 4: Compassion Satisfaction Contributing Factors

Category	**Key Terms**	**Main Theme**
Organizational Culture	communication, interaction with staff, leadership, mission focus, structure, environment, identification with, appreciation,	The staff make apparent the essential role volunteers play in being able to deliver critical services through various mediums of communication and events and feedback loops.
Motivation	satisfied, engagement, job choice, identification with agency, fulfilling	I find satisfaction in knowing that I made a difference and I plan to be a helper for a long time.

Finally, I identify two major organizational categories that may attribute to volunteers' experience of burnout and/or compassion fatigue. I also identified three major categories that explain volunteers' experience of burnout and/or compassion fatigue that are not controllable by the organization. See Tables 5 and 6 for a sample listing of the factors or codes from the raw data that contributed to the development of each theme. Because ADRN and ARC vary in their organizational structure, the nuances of their organizational themes are not reflected in Table 5.

Table 5: Organizational Factors Contributing to Burnout and/or STS

Category	Key Terms	Main Themes
Volunteer Management	orientation, training, job choice or assignment,	Training is focused on the volunteer's job task and does not give an adequate role perception to the volunteer leaving them unprepared for the emotional and physical demands experienced in a disaster event.
Volunteer Management	supervision, feedback, debrief, support	Agency resources for support are not well known to volunteers and volunteers must initiate or explicitly ask for supervision and/or support to receive it.
Volunteer Management	long work days, lack of resources, no support, no breaks, pressure, fill the need	The agency does not set and/or uphold an explicit work structure in terms of limiting hours, field exposure, and break times for volunteer involvement during a disaster relief event.
Organizational Culture	communication, interaction with staff, leadership, mission focus, structure, environment, identification with, appreciation,	Volunteers perceive agency communication to be one-directional where decisions are made by a tight-knit leadership core.

Table 6: Individual Factors Contributing to Burnout and/or STS

Category	Key Terms	Main Theme
Boundaries	workload, exhaustion, pressure, need, related to a client, personal involvement, going above and beyond, emotional involvement	Volunteers are unable to set boundaries for themselves.
Personality	awareness, compassion, emotional separation, coping strategy	Not all volunteers are suited for disaster relief fieldwork.
Coping Strategies	talking, friends, taking breaks, walking, eating	Volunteers have varied coping strategies to deal with stress.

Narrative data in the form of direct quotations from participants as well as reflective summarizations of data will inform the reader of the main findings of this study.

Overall Volunteer Experience of a Disaster Relief Operation

The first research question aims to understand the general experience volunteers have while on a disaster relief call including the setting, the workload, and their impressions of the job. These phrases taken directly from participants in this study describe what it is like being a disaster relief worker. A typical day is "12 hours", "working under pressure", "its hot", "different every time", and "unpredictable." These were the most common words or phrases given to describe a disaster relief operation (DRO).

Theme 1: Environmental aspect of a disaster relief work can be unsettling.

All volunteers in the focus group and in the interviews were able to recall vivid scenes of destruction and/or trauma during the DRO. The following direct quotes from participants illustrate their exposure to the environmental aftermath and the setting of their work.

- *… are unaware of the rigors of working in the field: it's hot, people have body odor and bad breath.*
- *…so many times we saw devastation. It was hard to take … to see a town you had once known or visited such as Wimberley and have it completely wiped out.*
- *As far as the eye could see, there were acres and acres of pick-up sticks of splintered houses. There was debris everywhere. A little girl found her wheelchair four blocks away.*
- *The disaster was just heart wrenching we assessed 2300 homes and 800+ were destroyed.*

Theme 2: Workload is intense and there is pressure to fill the need.

Volunteers commonly spoke about the long hours that were required on a DRO. The following are direct quotes from participants that demonstrate the intensity of their workload and the pressure volunteers felt.

- *When burning on adrenaline you don't realize that you haven't peed all day and that is not good.*
- *We deployed to Wimberley but, people didn't show up to the resource site. So, we went door to door in teams of two. In 1 week, we hit every address, about 300.*
- *At HQ it is easy to lose track of time. You don't realize that you skipped breakfast and lunch. Everyone is calling and you do not have 10 but 100 fires going on at the same time and you have to prioritize. There is no such thing as a minor thing, they are all really intense.*
- *And even though the agency doesn't want you doing this, I was doing 13 hour days. Just filling out paperwork. And then the next group would sit down. There was one time I didn't have lunch. There were that many people. And, I was just one individual. There were many of us doing this.*
- *…it is constant pressing need to stay, find resources, help them… y'know it's not fluff.*

Theme 3: Every disaster is different and flexibility is required.

Almost all participants that had participated in more than one disaster relief operation emphasized the uniqueness of every operation. The following quotes from participants that demonstrate the emphasis of this concept.

- *Every disaster is different and you need to be flexible and improvise.*
- *Out in the field, people do not know how the system is going to work out that day.*
- *It happens all the time that when I'm driving the ERV and I can't get to where I need to go. It happened during the Bastrop fires. I made a 30-mile detour and an hour and half later I made it there. You have to maneuver somehow.*
- *Every disaster is different and I'm doing different things most times.*
- *Every disaster event and every location within a single event has variation.*
- *Important to hammer home the unpredictability of a disaster event. People will encounter something brand new.*

Volunteers' experience with burnout and traumatic stress

Volunteers described personal or observed experiences of burnout and stress. Many volunteers were able to recall multiple stories of victims that they helped, which

prompted an emotional reaction such as getting teary, forcing them to pause or take a break during the interview or focus group. Only five volunteers explicitly stated that have experienced "burning out." All volunteers expressed having feeling exhausted and stressed at least one time during a DRO. Table 7 details burnout and stress symptoms mentioned by participants and the frequency with which these symptoms were mentioned during the focus group and individual interviews.

Table 7: Frequency of Burnout or Stress Symptoms Mentioned

Symptom Experienced	**Key Terms**	**Frequency**
Losing or Gaining weight	Weight loss, weight gain, eating, diet	2
Exhaustion	Exhaustion	10
Loss of motivation, ideals, or hope; Feeling helpless	Hopeless, "just a volunteer", couldn't do it anymore, it's too much	6
Guilt	Burden on my heart	1
Loss of energy	Falling, tired, physically unable, lack of sleep	10
Detachment or Isolation	Alone	4
Sadness or Depression	Crying, depression, sadness, sleeping more	5
Feeling sick	Sick, ill, hospital	6
Using food, drugs, or alcohol to cope	Eating, comfort foods, beer	4
Skipping work	Leaving early, no show, calling in sick,	4
Worry	Couldn't sleep, worry, involved, attached	5
Anger or Irritability	Angry, frustration, shouting, irritated,	5

The select quotes below demonstrate how volunteers' describe their personal or observed experience with burnout and stress.

- *I've seen volunteers' burnout. When the stress gets to them, they start to argue with other volunteers or correct other volunteers.*
- *There's an adrenal dump and your body slows down and you can't keep your eyes open because you had been working 12 hr. days. I actually got sick and I'm still recovering because I have a nasal infection because of the mold in the air. And, now, they have the same thing in Wimberley because of the mold. But, the adrenal dump, you spend your days on the couch, you just don't feel like doing anything. You have no energy. And if you aren't careful, you can go into a mild depression.*
- *My family members noticed that I dropped 10 pounds in a very short period of time, in a month. And that I wasn't eating.*

- *After 4 days in and 13 hour days, I broke. I just couldn't do it anymore. It wasn't until I started to physically breakdown that it was obvious that I was struggling.*
- *I just really felt very hopeless and every time I feel that I am making progress, then the playing field changes or there is an additional duty or the support is being taken away.*

Volunteers' experience with compassion satisfaction

Volunteers who expressed "satisfaction" with their volunteer effort contributed this feeling towards two main factors: personal motivation and organizational culture.

Theme 1: The staff make apparent the essential role volunteers play in being able to deliver critical services through various mediums of communication and events and feedback loops.

This theme was specific to ARC volunteers. Volunteers who attributed their sense of satisfaction to the organization frequently expressed their ability to "voice their opinions or concerns" and "felt heard" when they did so. The quotes highlight volunteer voice.

- *There is always an after-action report or lessons learned report. The administration always wants to talk about what we can do better.*
- *First Monday of the month is our regular meeting. More than 50 come. After a disaster especially, they talk about their experiences. From the surveys, they try really hard to make differences to improve the volunteer experience.*
- *Every year, the agency and its members including volunteers vote if the agency should continue to exist.*

Volunteers also expressed identifying with the agency and stated that they felt supported by staff members and volunteer peers. The following selected quotes highlight the camaraderie and appreciation felt by volunteers.

- *The agency hosts periodic functions and I know people that have developed friendships through volunteering. At the big emergency headquarters, they did tell people of happy hour for volunteers to have camaraderie for everyone.*
- *The agency constantly sends out email thank-yous and acknowledgements. They don't name people but they will tell stories of how someone has engaged with a family.*
- *Monthly newsletter also highlights organizational news and volunteer appreciation.*

- *I have had people watch me communicate with clients and have had many people say that they are trying to mimic me.*
- *The other volunteers I felt were very supportive.*

The organization also employs several methods to engage volunteers socially and provides a variety of opportunities for volunteers to contribute to the organization within their capabilities.

- *Even if you can't deploy on a DRO there is a need for help in the office. I helped provide coverage for administration and contribute to the efforts within my capacity.*
- *Quarterly the meetings are dedicated to recognizing volunteers and fun social gatherings.*
- *I did PR thing for the agency. I went to an elementary school with the ERV in Hutto and showed off the vehicle to 500 first and second graders. It was intense but, it was nice.. it was fun.*

Theme 2: I find satisfaction in knowing that I made a difference and I plan to be a helper for a long time.

Volunteers expressed satisfaction in knowing that they have contributed to advancing the mission of the organization and helping people. Most volunteers expressed an intent to volunteer for a long time. The following selected quotes illustrate volunteer motivation and personal source of satisfaction.

- *I think for most people that are called to this type of work, we have a heart for people and we love God and we have a heart for service.*
- *I lost both parents before 35 years old. My heart has been softened by my own personal experiences and my heart goes out to people that are experiencing difficulty. Nice to know that I can make a difference. Work encourages me to volunteer and I have won volunteer of the year twice through my work.*
- *It's the people person personality that makes me come back. I like being around people, their stories, and helping them through the tough times.*

Organizational factors that contribute to volunteer burnout and stress

When volunteers expressed frustration, disappointment, stress, and dissatisfaction with their volunteer role it was frequently related to an aspect of volunteer management. Within volunteer management, the study focused on understanding volunteers'

preparedness or training for their job duties and the experience that they would encounter on a DRO. The study also examined volunteers' experience with supervision, staff support, or debriefing during or after their service.

Theme 1: Agency does not set work limitations for the volunteers and expects the volunteer to be aware of his/her own capabilities and set their boundaries.

Both agencies expect volunteers to have an awareness of their limitations and capabilities. No set schedule or limitations are drawn for volunteers by the agency. However, the ARC requires volunteers to take 1 day off every 6 days on the job but, does not dictate the amount of hours a volunteer can work in one day. ADRN volunteers out in the field have two four-hour shifts, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Volunteers at the ADRN headquarters do not have scheduled shifts. The quotes illustrate the lack of boundary setting by the agency.

- *The agency would tell you in general if you are tired to get up, walk around, have a coke, or something like that. But, there are no schedule times for you to take breaks. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to know when they need a break.*
- *The agency does not expect people to do 12 hour days. I chose to do that. But, no one was discouraging me to shorten my days either. The people that knew I was doing long hours were also doing just as long of hours. They were there before I got there.*
- *I was working 12-16 hours a day. No one was pushing me to do that but, I saw the need and I'm the only Spanish speaker, so there was a lot of pressure to stay. Apparently, my name and personal cellphone number got on the official resource list as a Spanish-English translator and I still get calls.*
- *In the headquarters, there are no specific shifts but, they are needed because volunteers are so busy. We try to force them to take breaks but, in a disaster it may happen 2-3 weeks down the road and not every day do they feel that they can take a break.*
- *Now, they weren't standing behind me saying do this at all. But, they would say it would be wonderful if you could stay but if you need to go, then go.*

Due to the difference of organizational structure, ADRN and ARC differ in organizational culture and volunteer management strengths and weaknesses. These

specific differences of organizational structure that affect volunteer experience are summarized in the Table 8.

Table 8: Differences in Volunteer Management between ADRN and ARC.

Category	Agency	Structure	Theme
Volunteer Supervision, Support, and Debriefing	ADRN	The agency consists of a network of churches and is not considered separate from the church's mission.	The agency considers the church to be the main source of support for the volunteer and the volunteer should seek out support through their respective church.
	ARC	The agency has Disaster Mental Health Services available for clients and volunteers.	Agency resources for support are not well known to volunteers and volunteers must initiate or explicitly ask for supervision and/or support to receive it.
Volunteer Training	ADRN	The agency promotes and provides training for two 2 disaster functions: CISM (emotional) and CERT (physical)	Unless volunteers participate in either CISM or CERT functions in the field, volunteers are not obliged to have done any formal training to be assigned a job leading volunteers at headquarters unprepared for their role.
	ARC	The agency many volunteer functions and an extensive training menu. The agency requires the volunteer to be have formal job training for their specific task.	Training is focused on the volunteer's job task and does not give an adequate role perception to the volunteer leaving them unprepared for the emotional and physical demands experienced in a disaster event.
Organizational culture	ADRN	The agency is characterized by a line organizational structure where authority follows chain of command.	Volunteers perceive agency communication to be one-directional where decisions are made by a tight-knit leadership core
	ARC	The agency uses matrix organizational structure where decision making is shared between staff and volunteers.	Volunteers perceive agency to be transparent and there are formal mechanisms to ensure functioning feedback loop.[1]

[1] Theme is not discussed because it is not considered to be a factor that contributes to volunteer burnout or stress. This theme is addressed in contributing factors to volunteer compassion satisfaction.

Theme 2: Training is focused on the volunteer's job task and does not give an adequate role perception to the volunteer, leaving them unprepared for the emotional and physical demands experienced in a disaster event.

Volunteers cited that 60% of their training was focused on their job tasks while 20% focused on overall agency orientation, 10% on appropriate communication with clients, and 10% on volunteer mental health. The quotes illustrate the emphasis on knowing the job task.

- *Absolute priority is the forms and the paperwork. The overriding goal in a disaster is getting the case opened. If there is an opportunity we can explain what happens after the disaster – the come down and the aftermath. However, when there is a rush and pressure, that aspect does not get covered.*
- *The specific skill set for the task is mandatory and the majority of the training is focused on doing the job.*
- *Caseworkers can get personally involved. But, I try to tell volunteers to keep some distance. It is important to feel empathy and compassion but it is more important to complete paperwork properly.*

The ADRN focuses their field operation efforts on two principle functions: counseling or clean-up. These functions correlate with the agency's two main training programs: (CISM), which is the counseling aspect and (CERT) which focuses on the physical aspects of disaster recovery. Both these training programs are extensive and require more than 14 to 26 hours of coursework. Plus, volunteers undergo simulation exercises to help them gain perspective of what to expect on a disaster relief operation. Specifically with CISM training, volunteers are trained in burnout awareness. The following selected quotes from volunteers who have been trained in CISM illustrate the level of preparedness in the field.

- *I took the orientation and the CISM class which is for emotional and spiritual support. Two weeks later West happened, two week after that the tornadoes in Oklahoma happened. Then the Halloween floods happened. CISM prepared me to do my job and helped me gain an awareness too.*
- *Through CISM training I was able to recognize that I was heading towards burnout after 3 days. Realized was overextending myself beyond my ability or readiness.*

Volunteers at ADRN headquarters are not obligated to undergo formal training before being assigned to their roles, such as in the call center or with data entry. Training classes for these positions are available and are 3.5 hours in length but are not obligatory.

The following selected quotes illustrate the experience of volunteers at headquarters:

- *The most common thing I hear from volunteers at headquarters is that "I had no idea what I was signing up for, especially the commitment of time.*
- *Due to time constraints and level of work, there was no time to troubleshoot on the front end of the potential or warn people or educate someone that is new of the pitfalls of volunteering.*
- *It was very on-the-job training to get the particular chore done. There was no time nor staffing to do training on a deeper level.*
- *I would have benefitted from structured training and a clear agreement that would come with any undertaking.*

Table 9: Example of Participants' Training

Participant & Agency	Formal training topics covered	Medium of training	Hours total trained	No. of Disaster Relief Ops	Level of confidence of role in field
ADRN 1	CISM & CERT	In person	26+	3	high
ADRN 2	Orientation	In-person	>5	1	low
ADRN 3	Orientation	In-person	>5	1	low
ADRN 4	CISM & CERT	In-person	26+	4	high
ADRN 5	Orientation	In-person	>5	3	Medium
ARC 1	Casework	Online	>10	1	Medium-low
ARC 2	Mass Care	In-person	15+	5+	High
ARC 3	Mass Care	In-person	15+	5+	High
ARC 4	Disaster Action	In-person	10+	5+	High
ARC 5	Sheltering	In-person	10+	5+	High

Theme 3: Agency resources for support are well known to long-term volunteers. Volunteers must initiate or explicitly ask for supervision and/or support to receive it.

Most volunteers were either unaware of resources that were available to them at the agency. No ARC volunteers reported having used the resources at the agency even though they know that they are available to them. Only one volunteer was able to cite having known one other volunteer to have reached out for disaster mental health services. The following quotes are from ARC volunteers and illustrate their knowledge of support services available from the agency.

- *Debriefing is possible on an individual basis if requested by the volunteer. The volunteer is responsible for seeking out help from the organization. The Red Cross offers mental health services to volunteers. If an organization believes that a debriefing is necessary then the organization will reach out, normally if there is a death.*
- *She disclosed that she had a problem and asked for resources. Not everyone admits that they have a problem. She had been a longtime volunteer and was starting to not want to volunteer, the organization realized that and asked. She had 3 sessions with the disaster mental health counselor.*
- *The structure and the resources are there. But there is a gap. There are people that are working 20 days straight and when they return they have their normal lives to attend to. Volunteers are dismissive because they are busy or may not want a debrief.*
- *I know they have a mental health service that is offered. I'm not sure what is involved. But, I suspect it is for both volunteers and clients. And, upon checking out of the shelter or the disaster group from the very last time. In other words, this is not a daily thing. But, when you are signing out, there is a form that you have to sign. There is a line in there that asks if you need mental health assistance or physical assistance. So, there is one little safeguard say if you it was really traumatic.*

Theme 4: ADRN considers the church to be the main source of support for the volunteer.

Typically volunteers join ADRN because their church is part of the ADRN network. The mental health support provided at ADRN is through either a rotating volunteer chaplain or CISM volunteer. The selected quotes illustrate the church's importance in providing mental health support.

- *The church may not know who is volunteering from their church in ADRN. It is up to the church base to provide support.*
- *The churches are really the providers of spiritual assistance for volunteers not ADRN. Each church has a disaster coordinator. And that person markets the classes and organizes core groups. The coordinators report to the pastor. The coordinator brings all the Shepherds together or all the people that are CISM trained together and build teams that way. This is currently in process right now. The ideal is that those teams get together once a month. Every church is different.*
- *Volunteers can trigger their own trauma by helping victims. Really putting it into the church's court to provide spiritual debriefing.*

Theme 5: Volunteers perceive agency communication to be one-directional where a tight-knit leadership core makes decisions.

Volunteers were asked about the organizational culture at the agency, specifically about engaging volunteers in decision-making, meetings, and leadership communication style with volunteers. The following selected quotes offer insight into the volunteers' perception of the organizational leadership at ADRN.

- *There is no formal mechanism for feedback to the agency. There is a yearly strategic forum everyone is invited to give opinions and participate. But, some feedback is unrealistic in a short time frame. It takes time and volunteers get frustrated. The perception is that their voice does not get heard.*
- *I don't think there is great awareness at a higher level on keeping an eye on people so that they don't burn themselves out.*
- *There are core groups in each of these areas to plan the training and that is made of 5-6 people and I imagine that they get together often to do make those plans.*
- *I noticed a need and had asked to set up a Facebook group under the ADRN Facebook page and that would really help us to fill the need to have quicker communication of who will be there and also serve as a morale booster and give people a sense of belonging and identity as part of an effort. I didn't get any feedback on that.*
- *…wrote a beautiful thank you letter and urged the director to send it out but, with that kind of touchy feely thing and so much to do, it didn't really register on the radar.*
- *My emails, my calls, my text about that were not being answered and Saturday, the day I intended to take off, after 26 straight days. I was just deluged with emails, texts, and emergency phone calls that key support person had been reassigned and I had no idea. It was just a scramble.*

Theme 6: There is a lack of resources and order for volunteers to adequately do their job in a timely manner.

When volunteers spoke about their frustrations, they specifically mentioned the lack of resources that were in order and up to date. The selected direct quotes illustrate volunteers' experience with this.

- *Time wasn't spent well because the process weren't in place to do it. We ended up doing a lot of waiting because there were computer problems. So, there were things that would set me back a few hours. So, I was more motivated to stay because we lost those hours and we need to get a few hours of productive time in.*
- *Currently, there is no database to efficiently track volunteers who have deployed or the number of hours volunteers have been on the field. Moving the data is difficult from paper to electronic.*
- *Even though it is a volunteer commitment, I have found it very difficult to get any documentation ad hoc or otherwise from the woman that was in the role previously or in a similar role.*
- *Computers often are not working or fast enough or freeze up. It is very frustrating when you don't have the tools to do the job.*
- *The individual stations often did not have a working phone, and often did not have computers.*

Personal factors not controllable by the agency that contribute to volunteer burnout and stress

This study considered all factors that contribute to volunteer burnout and stress and examined them through two lenses, factors that are agency solvable and factors that can be attributed to the volunteers' personal characteristics and individual coping strategies.

Theme 1: Volunteers are unable to set boundaries.

When describing a typical day on a DRO, all volunteers mentioned the number of hours worked, as an indicator of the external or internal pressure they felt. The selected quotes illustrate volunteers' pushing themselves outside of their normal limits and capabilities or the lack of awareness of their limitations.

- *So, how do I work a 4 hour day when 12 or 16 is really needed? And there are people who have no place to sleep tonight. And, that was very difficult for me to see that level of need and think I can help. I just couldn't leave until I was exhausted because of the great need.*
- *My attitude however long it takes I can take off. Let's just get the job done. I stayed as long as they told me that they were caught up. I was prepared to stay for as long as they needed me.*

Theme 2: Not all volunteers are suited for disaster relief fieldwork.

In trying to understand volunteer burnout and stress, participants were asked about the ideal personality of a volunteer that is best suited for disaster relief work. Unanimously, volunteers stated that the individual should be patient, flexible, and compassionate. Another frequently mentioned personality trait was the ability to emotionally separate from the victim. Some volunteers disclosed that they had difficulty with this because of previous personal trauma or that they were sensitive. The selected quotes illustrate the volunteer personality that may susceptible to burnout and stress.

- *I was just struck by the magnitude of what people had gone through and trying to step out of that and not be emotionally involved took me a few days to get that emotional distance.*
- *Volunteers that can only think "I want to help these people." Sadly, it is those volunteers that may get personally involved.*
- *The worst volunteers are stay at home moms – they take it too personally because of their intimate contact with their family. They tend to personalize the event. They have limited day to day contact with people and get overwhelmed easily.*

The following selected quotes illustrate the volunteer personality that may be best suited for disaster relief work.

- *I can deal with things in a way where I can separate myself. I engage with the victim but I don't absorb their story or take it into my life. The distancing is something that I learned before coming to the agency.*
- *…compassionate person, tender hearted, someone that has good and healthy boundaries that can take care of themselves.*
- *I am made for a disaster because I get calm, very alert and it is a call for action and not hiding.*
- *A disaster volunteer must be flexible and willing to change. Take on any task that is given to you and complete it to the best of your ability.*

It was well established from all volunteers that responding to a disaster relief call is stressful and can lead to burnout. To understand the behaviors that mitigate stress and burnout, volunteers were asked about the coping strategies they employed while out in the field. Perhaps due to ADRN's strong Christian focus, all volunteers mentioned prayer as prominent strategy in their lives. The selected direct quotes illustrate how volunteers handle stress.

- *Deep breathing helps.*
- *I also suggest the spiritual trainings because it is important balance the spiritual grow with the other training. You can get spiritual strength from that.*
- *Just laugh about it because that's all we can do.*
- *Experience, intuition, and knowing yourself will help with burnout prevention.*
- *In West, I ate myself through stress. They had tons of candy.*
- *Need to pray up before you go and pray down when you leave.*
- *Drink water and take breaks.*
- *It is important to keep focused on the mission services. It helps to keep you going through the stress and lack of sleep.*
- *To deal with it, I just worked through it. I focused on the people and then just probably focused more because I knew I was getting tired. When you start getting cross eyed, you can get up and walk outdoors for a little bit.*
- *I have told a lot of people and friends that wanted to know what it was like. I told them the stories that I heard.*

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

I obtained 10 completed Compassion Satisfaction/Fatigue Self-Tests from the individual interview participants. The focus group participants were emailed the Self-Test and none were returned fully complete. I did not score the focus group participants for this reason. Most interviewed volunteers scored high on compassion satisfaction, low on burnout, and low on compassion fatigue. Only two participants scored having moderate burnout. No participants scored with high levels of burnout or high level of compassion fatigue.

SUMMARY

The first research question aimed to learn about the general experience of volunteers on a disaster relief operation. The descriptions provided by the volunteers in this study show that being on a disaster relief operation can be intense, uncomfortable, and unpredictable. All participants reported that while the job is demanding, they continue to do the work because of the overwhelming need for services and because they feel satisfied in being able to help meet that need. In the second research question, I explore the volunteers' symptomology of burnout and stress. The most cited feelings felt after a disaster relief operation was exhaustion and loss of energy. In the third question, I examine organizational and individual factors that contribute to volunteers' experience of burnout and stress. Organizational factors related to volunteers' experience of burnout and stress generally fell into volunteer management with workload limitations being a prominent feature. Other themes included lack of training that provides adequate role perception and emotional readiness, lack of resources to effectively perform roles, lack of or minimal promotion of formal debriefing and supervision mechanisms, and the lack of feedback loops. Individual factors contributing to volunteers' experience of burnout and stress were boundary maintenance, personality and coping skills. The findings from this study are compared to existing research in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Discussion

Researchers have noted the dearth of academic scholarship on disaster volunteerism, including the behaviors and activities of disaster volunteers (Baster-Tomkins & Wallace, 2006; Moran et al, 1992). By conducting a qualitative study, I was able to gain an understanding of disaster volunteers' lived experiences. The research questions specifically examine disaster relief volunteers' experience in the field including their feelings and reactions to their volunteer assignment, workload, training, supervision, engagement and interaction with the organization. The purpose of the study is to determine factors that contribute to volunteers' experience with burnout and stress during a disaster event. Factors were distinguished between organizational solvable factors from individual factors not controllable by the organization. The findings from this study are discussed within the corresponding research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: WHAT THEMES EMERGE FROM PARTICIPANTS' ACCOUNTS OF THEIR VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE?

A volunteers' perspective of a disaster helps to understand and examine the activities and behaviors illustrated after a crisis. Three main themes stood out among the findings from the research study: 1) the environmental aspect of disaster relief work can be unsettling, 2) workload is intense and there is pressure to fill the need, and 3) every disaster is different and flexibility is required.

These three themes are reflected in previous disaster relief studies (Dynes, 1970; Jansen, 2010; Rozwadwska et al., 2011; Norris, 2005). Participating volunteers in this study were able to recall vivid memories of their experience on a disaster relief operation (DRO). In general, volunteers' experience was colored by a demanding workload, uncomfortable working conditions of heat, space constraints, and offensive smells.

Volunteers also recalled the "heart wrenching" physical devastation of the disaster event and the suffering of others. There was a strong emphasis of unpredictability among volunteers that had responded to more than one disaster event. The structural shifts of an organization as well as the changes in role and services an organization offers is typical in a DRO (Dynes, 1970; Egan & Tischler, 2010). Due to the constant changing demands, volunteers are expected to adapt to the needs that may arise in the field and to be ready to take on those tasks.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: HOW DO VOLUNTEERS EXPERIENCE BURNOUT AND/OR COMPASSION FATIGUE AND /OR COMPASSION SATISFACTION? WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR EXPERIENCE OF BURNOUT AND/OR COMPASSION FATIGUE AND/OR COMPASSION SATISFACTION?

This research explored disaster relief volunteers' experience with burnout and/or compassion fatigue (referred to in this study as secondary traumatic stress) and/or compassion satisfaction. The organizational and individual factors that contribute to burnout and secondary traumatic stress (STS) will be discussed in the third research question.

Burnout is largely characterized by exhaustion (Jenkins & Baird, 2002). Previous research on disaster relief volunteers have found that volunteers' often experience shock, tiredness, helplessness, stress, guilt, and identify with victims (Clukey, 2010; Walsh, 2009). These reactions are similar to those reported by volunteers in this study. The most commonly cited reactions by volunteers were exhaustion, loss of energy, feeling helpless, and feeling sick.

Compassion satisfaction is the positivity felt by helpers involved in caring (Phelps et al., 2009). Research has shown that the more person-job congruence in the Maslach and Leichter's (1997) six areas of work life the likely predictor of compassion

satisfaction (Ray et al., 2013). Volunteers' report of compassion satisfaction correlated to three factors: rewards, fairness, and values. Volunteers' motivations to join their respective organization reflected the values of each of the organizations. ADRN volunteers attributed their satisfaction to having a "heart for service" and to their spiritual beliefs. Whereas, ARC volunteers focused on the humanitarian aspect of helping people and "making a difference" for others' in need.

Scholars attribute an individual's satisfaction with their volunteer experience to their identification and connection with the organization (Cheney et al., 2004; Dorsch et al., 2002). Volunteers with high compassion satisfaction stated that they felt supported and appreciated by other staff and volunteers. Volunteers demonstrated their connection to the agency by wearing matching vests or shirts as well as keeping their badges in their car for easy access. Specific to ARC, the organization offers different events such as meeting, potlucks, and social hour for volunteers to deepen their connection to the agency and to each other. ARC volunteers also mentioned formalized and functioning feedback loops to express their opinions and concerns. This is consistent with previous research correlating the perception of voice as a contributing factor to satisfaction (Allen & Muller, 2013; Garner & Garner, 2011).

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: TO WHAT EXTENT DOES VOLUNTEERS' EXPERIENCE OF BURNOUT AND/OR COMPASSION FATIGUE REFLECT AGENCY SOLVABLE FACTORS? TO WHAT EXTENT DO THEY REFLECT EXTERNAL FACTORS NOT CONTROLLABLE BY THE AGENCY?

Trauma research indicates the coexistence of STS and burnout. According to one analysis, the association between STS and burnout is as high and shares 48% of the variance (Cieslak et al., 2014). Though STS is related to work-life, it has greater correlation to environmental factors of a disaster, such as magnitude of destruction, and

an individual's personal characteristics, such as perception of a disaster event, coping skills, and personality (Adams, 2007; Ozer et al., 2008). Researchers agree that burnout is related to organizational stressors (Allen & Mueller, 2013; Janssen, 2010; Jenkins & Baird, 2002; Rozwadwska et al., 2011; Maslach & Leiter 1997). Using Maslach and Leiter's (1997) predictors of burnout (see Table 1) this section goes over organizational factors that contribute to volunteers' experience of burnout.

Organizational Factor: Workload

Theme 1: Agency does not set limits on involvement for the volunteers and expects the volunteer to be aware of her/her own capabilities and set their boundaries.

The demands in a DRO have been characterized by participating volunteers in this study as intense. All volunteers in this study had similar experiences with length of hours and workload, finding it to be intense, often working more than 10 hours a day and for several days straight. Volunteers frequently mentioned the pressure they felt to stay and work long hours to fill the need or demand for services by victims. Volunteers stated that though the agency did not enforce the long working hours, the agency also did not impose boundaries or limitations on volunteers' involvement. The intensity of the work likely contributes to volunteers' feeling of exhaustion and loss of energy.

Organizational Factor: Control

Leiter and Maslach (2004) characterized control as the individual's capacity to influence decisions that affect their work and to gain access to resources necessary to do an effective job. Training increases volunteer confidence and effectiveness as helpers (Jankoski, 2010). By reducing uncertainty through training, the volunteer has an increase in control and has been shown to be a key variable in mitigating burnout and STS for disaster relief workers (Perrin et al., 2007).

Theme 2: Training is focused on the volunteer's job task and does not give an adequate role perception the volunteer leaving them unprepared for the emotional and physical demands experienced in a disaster event.

The ARC has a plethora of jobs and tasks for volunteers, such as in logistics, casework, shelter management, feeding, and disaster assessment, among others. Due to variety of job functions, the ARC emphasizes knowledge and expertise of the job task. Volunteers reported that 60% of training is dedicated to knowing how to fill out paperwork, 20% to general agency orientation, 10% to victim mental health, and 10% to volunteer mental health. The ARC offers one optional class called Psychological First Aid, which is 4 hours in length. The limited training time and the focus on concrete knowledge and skills does not leave space for integrating and conceptualizing a coherent role perception (Warner, 2011).

The ARC has a specific team of licensed professionals nurses, social workers, and counselors to administer disaster mental health to victims. However, a disaster mental health worker is likely not the first and only person that a disaster victim will have contact with given the variety of needs. The scarce attention to volunteer and victim mental health preparedness and the overemphasis of task expertise leaves volunteers without the necessary resource to effectively preform their job, which in part is to communicate compassionately with victims.

The ADRN, unlike the ARC, has two main disaster relief functions: counseling and physical clean-up. In addition to this difference, the ADRN charges $105 for each training session in these two functions, known as CISM (counseling) and CERT (physical clean-up). Most volunteers that are deployed to the field have formal training in one or both of these functions. Volunteers who reported taking CISM or CERT stated that they felt prepared for their job in the field both physically and emotionally. In addition, the ADRN offers multiple classes specific to spiritual guidance.

In contrast to field volunteers, volunteers assigned to ADRN headquarters reported not being required to have done any formal training before beginning work. Due to the lack of formal practices for headquarter volunteers, an adequate role perception was not achieved for headquarter volunteers participating in this study. Headquarter ADRN volunteers mentioned having "no idea" of the pitfalls that they would encounter or the commitment of time that was required of them to adequately perform their duties.

The lack of training in both of these organizations does not allow volunteers to have an adequate role perception of the emotional and physical demands that they will encounter. This adds to volunteers' feelings of loss of energy, helplessness, frustration, and loss of motivation or confidence.

Theme 3: There is a lack of resources and order among available materials for volunteers to adequately do their job in a timely manner.

All ADRN volunteers interviewed reported frustration with the lack of resources that were in order and up to date, including files, database of resources, and computer operating systems. This significantly delayed volunteers' ability to be effective at their jobs. The lack of resources added to volunteers' workload and lengthened the time they spent on a disaster relief operation. It likely added to volunteers' feelings of helplessness, loss of motivation and irritability.

Organizational Factor: Community

Leiter and Maslach (2004) describe community as the overall quality of social interaction at work, including issues of conflict, support, and the capacity to work as a team. For this study, feedback, supervision, and debriefing were examined under this factor. Walsh (2009) found that debriefing and teamwork specifically alleviate traumatic stress associated with disaster relief work. Regardless of the form social support takes, it

was been found to contribute to greater engagement and affirms the person's membership within the organization (Jamison, 2003; Thormar et al., 2013).

Theme 4: Agency resources for support are well known to long-term volunteers. Volunteers must initiate or explicitly ask for supervision and/or support to receive it.

As part of this study, volunteers' use of supervision and available debriefing resources were examined. All ARC volunteers reported awareness of disaster mental health services and its availability to volunteers as well as victims. However, none of the volunteers have used the services nor know of its details or how to access the services. Volunteers assumed that the individual would have to explicitly request the support in order to receive it but, are uninformed of where that request should be filed or to whom or if the request could be made confidentially. This is in line with previous research indicating the rarity that secondary victims of trauma are less likely to seek their own professional mental health because they do not feel as entitled to assistance of the primary victims (Figley, 2002).

ARC volunteers state that there is a formal debriefing process after a disaster relief operation that occurs for more than 5 days. According to one volunteer who had been in the field for 9 days, he was required to fill out a form before ending his tour of duty. The volunteer considered this to be the debriefing and received no other contact regarding the matter. There is no formal debriefing process for volunteers who attend to single home or apartment fires. Though researchers have found significant correlation with debriefing and the reduction of stress and anxiety (Thormar et al., 2013; Ursano et al., 2007; Walsh, 2009), it remains unclear if the debriefing services in place for volunteers at the ARC are meaningful to participants as none of the volunteers had experience or could talk about their experience with the service. Previous research on

ARC volunteers report that they did not find the debriefing experience on site to be especially helpful or meaningful (Clukey, 2010).

The ADRN does not have specific supervision or debriefing mechanisms available to its volunteers. Volunteers trained in CISM are aware of burnout as it is covered in the course. ADRN attempts to have a CISM trained volunteer at headquarters for non-CISM trained volunteers or a chaplain. However, multiple volunteers assigned to headquarters did not report having had experience with a debrief process through a CISM volunteer or chaplain. Volunteers also witnessed the physical debilitation of one or more of their peers, noting the lack of supervision and workload intensity.

Preventive measures such as self-awareness of burnout components through training could help organizations retain volunteers that leave due to this factor. The lack of utilized and meaningful supervision and debriefing adds to volunteers' feeling of sadness, feeling sick, feeling guilt, missing work, irritability, detachment, and loss of motivation.

Theme 5: ADRN considers the church to be the main source of support for the volunteer.

As mentioned previously, ADRN does not have specific supervision or debriefing mechanisms available to its volunteers. Because of the organization's structure as a network of churches, it considers the church as the volunteers' primary source for emotional and spiritual support. Volunteers interviewed for this study seemed to be aware of the church's importance in providing supportive resources. One volunteer reported not being able to attend her church because of the intense demand for resources by victims and felt guilty for being absent. Furthermore, when asked about relationships with peers, volunteers reported having closer ties with peers from their church and not knowing other ADRN colleagues or only knowing them superficially. Having less established

relationship with peers has shown to be a predictive factor of burnout and STS (Walsh, 2009). The lack of supportive services available at ADRN may contribute to volunteers' feeling of isolation, helplessness, guilt, and exhaustion.

Organizational Factor: Fairness

Fairness is the perception of volunteer voice as it relates to decision-making. Also included in this factor is the perception of leadership and their communication as being respectful and confirming of self-worth (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). Researchers have shown that volunteers who feel that their work is being valued are more likely to be committed to the organization (Hager & Brudney, 2004).

Theme 6: Volunteers perceive agency communication to be one-directional where decisions are made by a tight-knit leadership core.

This theme was specific to ADRN. All volunteers interviewed stated that decisions on resource allocation, including available trainings and technical support, were determined by a tight-knit leadership core. Volunteers stated that ADRN does not have regularly scheduled meetings with volunteers or have feedback tools for volunteers to voice opinions, concerns or offer suggestions. This has led volunteers to believe that the core leadership is unaware of the needs of volunteers. As volunteer voice has seen to be a key factor in resolving communication gaps (Garner & Garner, 2011), the perceived lack of volunteer voice at the ADRN may contribute to volunteers' lack of motivation, feeling of helplessness, feeling sick, skipping work, and frustration.

Personal Factors Not Controllable by the Agency

Stressful experiences are not solely determined by the disaster event or the organizational stressors. Many characteristics unique to the individual will influence what type of reaction, if any, one has to the disaster event (Adams, 2007; Ozer et al., 2008).

Two main themes were highlighted among the volunteer participants of this study. The individual's (1) ability to set boundaries and (2) personality and their coping strategies.

Theme 1: Volunteers are unable to set boundaries.

All volunteers stated that they felt overextended by the long work hours and seemed incapable of leaving until physically exhausted due of the demand for services by disaster victims. Disaster relief volunteering is a perfect storm for individuals unable to set boundaries for themselves and for organizations that do not hold firm to limiting exposure and workload. It is a false assumption for agencies to assume volunteers can set their own boundaries and be able to schedule breaks when volunteers' motivation and sense of urgency can cause them to overwork themselves (Warner, 2011).

Prolonged exposure of a disaster event has shown to be an influential variable contributing to traumatic stress (Figley, 2002; Thormar et al., 2013). Though direct exposure to the disaster event may not be prevented, the organization has the authority to control volunteer working hours. Working long hours is related to volunteers' feeling of exhaustion, feeling helpless, guilt, loss of energy, feeling sick, sadness and irritability.

Theme 2: Not all volunteers are suited for disaster relief work.

Due to the nature of the disasters, volunteers work in unpredictable and continuously changing conditions. Studies have shown that individuals with certain levels of neuroticism, agreeableness, extraversion, openness to experiences, and awareness are better at decreasing their risk of burnout (Aragones, 2001; Howard & Johnson, 2004). Volunteers in this study pointed out that people who thrive in disaster relief work are patient, flexible, compassionate, and able to emotionally separate themselves from the victim. When asked how volunteers' were able to develop ability to emotional separate themselves, all volunteers stated that it takes an awareness of self to do so. Self-

awareness has been cited as being a beneficial preventative measure to decrease burnout (Grant & Langan-Fox, 2007).

Volunteers' more susceptible to burnout and STS have a combination of high level of empathy, trauma history, unresolved trauma, and have been exposed to children's trauma (Figley, 1995). Two volunteers reported having previous trauma, which was a motivating factor to volunteer. Five volunteers recalled vivid memories of dealing with children's trauma while on a disaster relief operation. Volunteers that had exposure to children's trauma showed strong emotional reaction and required a break from the interview or focus group to recollect themselves.

Researchers indicate that an individuals' personality is linked to their coping strategies, which help individuals to adjust to occupational stressors (Jenaro et al., 2007; Lockenhoff et al., 2009; Salami, 2011). Coping is determined by an individual's ability to manage circumstances through handling stress which is causing a problem or handling emotions that are caused by stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). By understanding an individual's personality, the organization can determine how an individual will cope with stress and can properly assign a job or task better suited to the volunteer.

It is believed that problem-focused coping styles increases the sense of personal achievement and decreases stress that leads to physical exhaustion (Jenaro et al., 2007). Problem-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) takes the form of avoiding taking on more responsibility than one can manage, staying focused on the task at hand, and learning from experience. Volunteers stated several problem-focused coping strategies such as using experience, intuition, and self-awareness to help with burnout and keeping focused on the services being provided to the client.

Emotion-focused coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) involve dealing with the feelings that are stirred up as a consequence of the stressor. This coping strategy,

which is more passive, has shown to be correlated with higher rates of emotional exhaustion (Jenaro et al., 2007). Volunteers frequently mentioned emotion-focused coping strategies, such as deep breathing, seeking spiritual guidance, and eating. Another coping strategy mentioned by volunteers was telling friends and family about the stories that they heard from victims and using humor. In talking about their experiences out on the field volunteers are able to vent emotions. The use of humor and story-sharing is in line with the previous research with crisis volunteers that showed signs of STS and burnout (Cyr & Dowrick, 1991; Moran et al., 1992).

Organizations should focus on strategies that increase problem-focused coping to help volunteers build and maintain a feeling of personal achievement. Strategies such as providing realistic job expectations and promoting the use of established support networks, such as formalized debriefing process and feedback loops, may decrease volunteers' experience with burnout and traumatic stress and promote efficacy.

LIMITATIONS

There were several limitations to the research. One limitation was the use of a non-probability sampling and the small sample size of only 17 participants in Austin, Texas. All participants are considered to be long-term volunteer and have responded to at least one disaster relief event and had contact jobs with victims. Given the sampling method and size, the results are not representative of any specific disaster response function and cannot be generalized to the entire volunteer population. Moreover, it cannot draw any conclusions based on regional differences among disaster relief volunteers. Another limitations may have been the assessment for burnout and secondary traumatic stress. Qualitative research relies on individuals being truthful and open about their experiences; individuals may over or underestimate their experience as well as

exaggerate or mask certain traits. Other challenges include the inability to control for other factors that influence burnout, such as personal circumstances, job stress, or family life.

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to understand disaster volunteers' experiences on a disaster relief operation, their experience with burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion satisfaction and determine the organizational factors and personal factors contributing to volunteers' feelings of burnout and stress. By having an explicit focus on volunteer management strategies, the disaster relief organizations can better understand the policies and practices required to retain volunteers and prevent volunteer burnout. The literature lacked qualitative understanding related to disaster relief volunteers' experience. Though this study had limitations, it helped fill this gap by adding rich data to the existing body of research.

The results from this study reveal that being a disaster relief volunteer can be exhausting, stressful and physically and emotionally demanding. From the organizational perspective, the main reasons given for the level of stress were inadequate training and role perception, long work hours due to the unpredictable nature of working on a disaster relief operation, lack of resources to be effective in their roles, deficient supervision and debriefing process, and inefficient feedback loops. Factors uncontrollable by the organization that added to volunteers' burnout and stress were volunteers' inability to set boundaries, personality, and coping skills.

Recommendations for Action

These suggested strategies for volunteer retention and the prevention of volunteer burnout are based on the data collected from the American Red Cross Central Texas Chapter and the Austin Disaster Relief Network via semi-structured interviews and a focus group. The recommendations for action follow the best practices in preventing burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

Recommendation 1: Reduce exposure by setting work limits for volunteers.

Prolonged exposure of a disaster event has shown to be an influential variable contributing to traumatic stress (Figley, 2002; Thormar et al., 2013). The findings show that volunteers may not have an adequate role perception and thus, are unaware of the physical and emotional demands that may be required of them. In addition to their lack of preparedness, volunteers may feel pressure to continue to work beyond their capabilities due to the sense of urgency that characterizes a disaster. Given that volunteers are sometimes unable to set limitations, the organization has the authority and obligation to monitor volunteer working hours. Time-limited shifts may reduce volunteer burnout and mediate traumatic stress.

Recommendation 2: Provide a realistic preview of disaster relief work.

By providing an extensive job description, potential volunteers can have a factual, concrete, specific concept of what the job would entail and then can make an informative decision whether or not disaster relief work is congruent with their personality (Graff, 2005). Requiring specific "deployment" training prepares volunteers for the reality of hardships that they may encounter in the field. Furthermore, as the findings suggest, not all volunteers are suited to fieldwork due to their personality traits and coping skills. Job descriptions that provide matching personality traits that are best suited to the position can allow the volunteer identify jobs that play to their strengths.

Recommendation 3: Prepare volunteers for the physical and emotional demands that are required as well as the technical skills need to effectively perform their jobs.

Awareness of the pitfalls that volunteers may encounter while working in the field reduces the impact of burnout and traumatic stress long-term (Jankoski, 2010). Volunteers indicate that very little attention is paid to volunteer mental health during training. All trainings should include a simulation exercise of what the volunteer may

encounter on the job as well as the potential for burnout. In addition, participation of veteran volunteers, who have experienced more than one disaster relief operation, in trainings may provide personal insight into the volunteer experience. This gives new volunteers a better notion of their role as well as enhances peer support and volunteer engagement.

Recommendation 4: The American Red Cross should conduct an extensive assessment of the effectiveness and utility of their supervision and debriefing process for volunteers.

Supervision plays a crucial role in mitigating burnout and traumatic stress. Supervision helps workers in decision making and fostering problem-focus coping behaviors (Lietz, 2010). Debriefing allows volunteers to process their exposure to trauma. Volunteers stated awareness of the disaster mental health service available to them but, could not speak to its utility or effectiveness. Given the importance of supervision and debriefing as a key factor in mitigating burnout (Spring et al., 2011; Yamatani et al., 2009), the ARC should assess the current supervision and debriefing process. An enhanced understanding of volunteers' experience could improve support mechanisms to better meet the needs of volunteers.

Recommendation 5: The ADRN should incorporate strategies that increase sense of community and volunteer voice.

Research has shown that volunteers who have a sense of connection with the organization are more likely to feel satisfied and show long term commitment (Jamison, 2003). Enhancing opportunities for volunteers to connect with others and encouraging volunteers to express their ideas through regular meetings and social events creates community and engagement.

CONCLUSION

The increased demand for disaster relief services in Central Texas is apparent. Hurricane Katrina in 2005[2], the Bastrop Fires of 2012, and Central Texas Memorial Day flooding of 2015 are only a few of the most recent disasters, which increased the need for disaster relief volunteers in Central Texas. Given the pivotal role that nonprofit organizations play in providing emergency assistance in the wake of disasters, it is important to examine how organizations safeguard their resources, especially trained and prepared volunteers.

The descriptive analysis and identification of some key issues within this study are important and provide useful insight into volunteerism within a disaster relief operation. This study contributes to the literature by exploring the lived experiences disaster relief volunteers in the field, their experiences with burnout and secondary traumatic stress, and the organizational factor and personal factors that contribute to volunteers' experience of burnout and stress.

As the findings from this study indicate, the stressful nature of a disaster relief operation can potentially cause volunteer burnout and stress. In order to assist volunteers in maintaining optimal mental health, organizations should limit volunteer working hours, provide realistic preview of the job demands, build awareness of the pitfalls volunteers may encounter on the job through adequate training, and strengthen organizational support through supervision, debriefing, and ensuring volunteer voice. Organizations that strengthen their resources, namely their volunteers, by looking after their health and well-being, maximize their positive impact on communities and enhance volunteer retention.

[2] During Hurricane Katrina response and recovery, 4,000 victims were evacuated to Austin, Texas and sheltered in the city's convention center (Smith, 2005).

Appendices

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Dear Volunteer,

I am a graduate student undertaking thesis research to understand volunteer burnout and compassion fatigue. The intent of the proposed study is to determine current practices, challenges and opportunities within the non-profit sector that prepare and support volunteers to handle traumatic or stressful conditions related to their volunteer positions. From this study, I hope to glean the best practices in preventing volunteer burnout in disaster relief services.

This project seeks to interview volunteers who have served on one or more disaster relief operations. If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be asked to meet with for an individual interview that will last approximately 1 hr. and also complete a survey after the interview. The survey will ask about attitudes, reactions, thoughts, and feelings you may have experienced in your volunteer work during a disaster relief effort. Your participation in this survey will last approximately 8 minutes.

Your survey answers and your interview will be strictly confidential. Your name will not be associated in any way with the report. Your response will be combined with many others and reported as a group form in a UT-Austin Professional Report.
The risks to you are considered to be minimal. It is possible that you may find some of the questions upsetting. If this happens to you, we will discontinue the interview. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time.

Thank you for taking time to consider participation in this study. Please contact me at your earliest convenience if you would like to schedule an interview to participate. I could be reached on this email address: olivaresr@utexas.edu.

Sincerely,

Rochelle Olivares

APPENDIX B: SCRIPT FOR ORAL CONSENT

I am a graduate student in public policy at the University of Texas at Austin. My study is titled "Strengthening Volunteer Management: Preventing Volunteer Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress." The purpose of this project is to determine current practices, challenges and opportunities within the non-profit sector that prepare and support volunteers to handle traumatic or stressful conditions related to their volunteer positions. This project seeks to interview individuals with knowledge of or experience with the volunteer program at your agency.

The purpose of this statement is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. I will answer any of your questions.

From these interviews, I hope to produce information that will improve volunteer management in the non-profit sector, specifically related to preventing volunteer burnout and secondary traumatic stress for disaster relief volunteers.

I will interview a maximum of 10 individuals from a variety of volunteer positions. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to **participate in a semi-structured interview of 1 – 1 ½ hrs**.

In order to facilitate the transcription of this interview, your interview will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. The audio recordings will be stored securely and only I will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be de-identified and kept until transcribed and then erased.

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study. This study is **confidential.** To protect your privacy, your responses will remain anonymous and we won't connect your name with anything that you say.

If it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review the study records, information that can be linked to you will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order. The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate it with you, or with your participation in any study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You will not receive any type of payment for participating in this study. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you agree to participate, please say "I agree."

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact me, Rochelle Olivares at **404.432.1020** or send an email to **olivaresr@utexas.edu.** This study has been reviewed and approved by The University Institutional Review Board and the study number is 2015-04-0076. For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at +1.512.471.8871 or email at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

APPENDIX C: VOLUNTEER INTERVIEW & FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

1. How long have you been volunteering with the agency and what types volunteer positions have you held?
2. Why did you choose to volunteer in disaster relief work?
    i. Please describe your personality.
3. Explain the process of becoming a volunteer with the agency.
    i. What are the most prominent topics that you remember?
    ii. How often do you have to go through training?
    iii. What has been your experience been with supervision, feedback, or debriefing?
4. What challenges do you have as a volunteer on a disaster relief operation?
    i. How do you manage the challenges related to your volunteer duties?
5. What are your typical feelings or reactions while on a disaster relief operation or after your service?
    i. Do your volunteer duties/job ever bring you stress or worry? Why or why not?
    ii. Does the agency train you on strategies to handle the typical feelings or reactions you just mentioned?
6. What resources are available to volunteers at the agency?
7. How does the agency communicate with volunteers?
    i. What types of mediums do they use?
    ii. Within those types of mediums, what is the agency normally trying to convey to volunteers?
8. How well do you know other volunteers?
    i. What opportunities exist to get to know other volunteers?
9. What recommendations would you make to the organization regarding training, supervision or retaining volunteers?

APPENDIX D: COMPASSION SATISFACTION/FATIGUE SELF-TEST AND ASSESSMENT PROFILE

Adapted with permission from Figley, C.R., (1995). Compassion Fatigue, New York: Brunner/Mazel. © B. Hudnall Stamm, Traumatic Stress Research Group, 1995 -1998 http://www.dartmouth.edu/~bhstamm/index.htm.

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Helping others puts you in direct contact with other people's lives. As you probably have experienced, your compassion for those you help has both positive and negative aspects. This self -test helps you estimate your compassion status: This includes your risk of burnout, compassion fatigue and satisfaction with helping others.

Consider each of the following characteristics about you and your current situation.
Write in the number that honestly reflects how frequently you experienced these characteristics in your volunteer program.

0 Never	1 Rarely	2 A Few Times	3 Somewhat	4 Often	5 Very Often

Items About You

_____1. I am happy.
_____2. I find my life satisfying.
_____3. I have beliefs that sustain me.
_____4. I feel estranged from others.
_____5. I find that I learn new things from those I care for.
_____6. I force myself to avoid certain thoughts or feelings that remind me of a frightening experience.
_____7. I find myself avoiding certain activities or situations because they remind me of a frightening experience.
_____8. I have gaps in my memory about frightening events.
_____9. I feel connected to others.
_____10. I feel calm.
_____11. I believe that I have a good balance between my work and my free time.
_____12. I have difficulty falling or staying asleep.
_____13. I have outburst of anger or irritability with little provocation
_____14. I am the person I always wanted to be.
_____15. I startle easily.
_____16. While working with a victim, I thought about violence against the perpetrator.
_____17. I am a sensitive person.
_____18. I have flashbacks connected to those I help.
_____19. I have good peer support when I need to work through a highly stressful experience.
_____20. I have had first-hand experience with traumatic events in my adult life.

_____21. I have had first-hand experience with traumatic events in my childhood.
_____22. I think that I need to "work through" a traumatic experience in my life.
_____23. I think that I need more close friends.
_____24. I think that there is no one to talk with about highly stressful experiences.
_____25. I have concluded that I work too hard for my own good.
_____26. Working with those I help brings me a great deal of satisfaction.
_____27. I feel invigorated after working with those I help.
_____28. I am frightened of things a person I helped has said or done to me.
_____29. I experience troubling dreams similar to those I help.
_____30. I have happy thoughts about those I help and how I could help them.
_____31. I experienced intrusive thoughts of times with especially difficult people I helped.
_____32. I have suddenly and involuntarily recalled a frightening experience while working with a person I helped.
_____33. I am preoccupied with more than one person I help.
_____34. I am losing sleep over a person I help's traumatic experiences.
_____35. I have joyful feelings about how I can help the victims I work with.
_____36. I think that I might have been "infected" by the traumatic stress of those I help.
_____37. I think that I might be positively "inoculated" by the traumatic stress of those I help.
_____38. I remind myself to be less concerned about the well being of those I help.
_____39. I have felt trapped by my work as a helper.
_____40. I have a sense of hopelessness associated with working with those I help.
_____41. I have felt "on edge" about various things and I attribute this to working with certain people I help.
_____42. I wish that I could avoid working with some people I help.
_____43. Some people I help are particularly enjoyable to work with.
_____44. I have been in danger working with people I help.
_____45. I feel that some people I help dislike me personally.

Items About Being a Helper and Your Helping Environment

_____46. I like my work as a helper.
_____47. I feel like I have the tools and resources that I need to do my work as a helper.
_____48. I have felt weak, tired, run down as a result of my work as helper.
_____49. I have felt depressed as a result of my work as a helper.
_____50. I have thoughts that I am a "success" as a helper.
_____51. I am unsuccessful at separating helping from personal life.
_____52. I enjoy my co-workers.
_____53. I depend on my co-workers to help me when I need it.
_____54. My co-workers can depend on me for help when they need it.
_____55. I trust my co-workers.
_____56. I feel little compassion toward most of my co-workers
_____57. I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with helping technology.
_____58. I feel I am working more for the money/prestige than for personal fulfillment.
_____59. Although I have to do paperwork that I don't like, I still have time to work with those help.
_____60. I find it difficult separating my personal life from my helper life.

_____61. I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with helping techniques and protocols.
_____62. I have a sense of worthlessness/disillusionment/resentment associated with my role as a helper.
_____63. I have thoughts that I am a "failure" as a helper.
_____64. I have thoughts that I am not succeeding at achieving my life goals.
_____65. I have to deal with bureaucratic, unimportant tasks in my work as a helper.
_____66. I plan to be a helper for a long time.

Compassion Assessment Profile

Compassion Satisfaction/Fatigue Self Test (Stamm & Figley, 1998, 1995)

Adapted with permission from Figley, C.R., (1995). Compassion Fatigue, New York: Brunner/Mazel. © B. Hudnall Stamm, Traumatic Stress Research Group, 1995 -1998 http://www.dartmouth.edu/~bhstamm/index.htm.

Measures

- Compassion Satisfaction
- Compassion Fatigue
- Burnout

Scoring

- Circle the following 23 #s: 4, 6-8, 12-13, 15-16, 18, 20-22, 28-29, 31-34, 36, 38-40, 44.
- Put a check by the following 16 items: 17, 23-25, 41-42, 45, 48, 49, 51, 56, 58, 60, 62-65.
- Put an "X" by the following 26 items: 1-3, 5, 9-11, 14, 19, 26-27, 30, 35, 37, 43, 46-47, 50, 52-55, 57, 59, 61, 66.

(Add the numbers you wrote next to the items for each set of items and note:)

- Add all circled numbers for your *Compassion Fatigue risk factor*: TOTAL =_____

26 or less=extremely low risk; 27-30=low risk; 31-35=moderate risk; 36-40=high risk; 41 or more=extremely high risk.

- Add all numbers with checks beside them for your *Burnout risk:* TOTAL = _____

36 or less=extremely low risk; 37-50=moderate risk; 51-75=high risk; 76-85=extremely high risk.

- Total numbers marked "X" for *Compassion Satisfaction factor:* TOTAL=_____

118 and above=extremely high potential; 100-117=high potential; 82-99=good potential; 64-81=modest potential; below 63-0=low potential.

FURTHER INTERPRETATION (Figley)

Distinguish between changing jobs & changing ways: Look as your 3 sub-scores and the various combinations:

Score	Burnout Level	Compassion Fatigue Level	Compassion Satisfaction Level
High	High Burnout	High CF	High Satisfaction
Medium	Mod Burnout	Mod CF	Mod Satisfaction
Low	Low Burnout	Low CF	Low Satisfaction

Change Careers:	High Burnout, High CF, Low Satisfaction
Change Jobs:	High Burnout, Low CF, High Satisfaction
Stay & Manage Stress:	Low Burnout, High CF, Mod Satisfaction
Change Client:	Low Burnout, Low, CF, Low Satisfaction

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